A PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP TO THE CLERGY AND PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF PENNSYLVANIA

Required to be read in all congregations of the Diocese on Sunday, August 4, or on another Sunday in August 2002, if August 4 is inconvenient.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Creator, and Christ Jesus our Savior.

The volatility of our domestic economy, rising unemployment, news of widespread corporate corruption, the omnipresent possibility of terrorist violence, the deployment of our military in Afghanistan and Bosnia, the religiously driven conflicts in the Middle East, the church sex scandals – all on top of the burdens we normally carry just to maintain our health and happiness – are making this summer an exceptionally turbulent time.

In such a season as this we need, as always, to hear Christ's call to us to be gentle and lowly of heart, loving and kind and mutually supportive of one another, and aware as seldom before of how good our God really is, with what beauty he made the world in which it is our privilege and pleasure to live and serve, and how vast is his love poured out for us in the cross of his beloved Son.

Our struggle as a diocese to live faithfully during this time is compounded by the troubling situation we face with regard to the discipline of one of our priests. I have heard from a number of you that there may be some confusion over the actions taken by the Standing Committee and me in response to decisions made by the Rev. Dr. David Moyer, the rector of the Church of the Good Shepherd, Rosemont. Specifically, some have wondered why our actions were necessary.

To explain the reasons for the inhibition of Father Moyer, and to ask for your prayers that between now and September 4 a way can be found to let the inhibition expire and avoid Father Moyer's deposition from the priesthood I am requiring that this Pastoral Letter be read today in every congregation of our diocese.

Because Father Moyer is president of Forward in Faith/North America (FIF/NA), a "traditionalist" organization, and because he and I differ in our approaches to the place of women and homosexual persons in the church, as well as on other theological and pastoral questions, some have erroneously depicted my inhibition of him as prejudicial with regard to those of a conservative theology. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I want to assure all of you that my aim is to create in our diocese a tolerant, inclusive, diverse community consonant with the identity Christ has given all of us in baptism and honoring "conservatives" and "liberals" alike. I am endeavoring to defend, not theological uniformity, but the ecclesial unity, of the church. My only purpose is to join the Church of the Good Shepherd with the diocese in a constructive, beneficent relationship of mutual interdependence. I am not asking the parish's members to change who they are. For example:

1. I am not trying to change the ways in which they worship. The Episcopal Church is governed by a Constitution and Canons that among other things require the use of the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*. That Book states on page 14 that in certain services "...the contemporary idiom may be conformed to traditional language." The parish in question has followed this rubric in producing its *Anglican Service Book*, and I support their use of it.

2. I am not attempting to impose a woman on them as their rector. The Episcopal Church as an institution recognizes the validity of the ordination of women as deacons, priests and bishops. The Episcopal Church accepts the fact that there are those who would prefer to worship with a male in the officiating role, and, while I have asked every parish searching for a priest to consider fairly women candidates, I have never forced any parish in our diocese to accept a woman over the objections of the vestry or parish.

3. I am not seeking to re-align their thinking on the place of gay men and lesbian women in our church. The Episcopal Church has not imposed sanctions on bishops who have ordained persons who are living in long term committed relationships with another of the same gender., Nor has any disciplinary action been taken against priests who have performed ceremonies blessing such relationships. At the same time, no action has been taken to condemn those who think that such relationships deserve the same condemnation as sexual promiscuity of any kind deserves.

4. I am not endeavoring to create theological uniformity. The Episcopal Church allows bishops, priests, deacons and laity alike to differ on the interpretation of Scripture and certain fundamental issues of theology. A bishop cannot compel members of the Church to hold as true the meaning and only the meaning he or she ascribes to particular words, and the same is true of the laity: they cannot insist that a priest or bishop hold as true the meaning and only the meaning the laity ascribe to particular words. For example, good Episcopalians, and good Anglicans for that matter, can say they believe in the doctrine of Atonement and yet have in mind different meanings for that statement of faith.

Our embrace of each other across differences in our diocese is one of our greatest strengths. Unfortunately, media coverage and other depictions of our differences as something negative have become so widespread that what should be only an

internal, diocesan disciplinary issue has been made iconic of a contest between so-called "conservatives" and so-called "liberals" throughout the Anglican Communion. The iconic nature of the conflict has only made healing it all the more difficult.

As for our disciplinary action, acting in accord with the canons of the Episcopal Church, the Standing Committee of our diocese, constituted by five clergy and five laity elected by the clergy of the diocese and lay representatives from our parishes, last February sent to me in writing its determination that Father Moyer had abandoned the Communion of this church by an open renunciation of the Discipline of this Church through his breach of a number of canons. As documented in the Report of the Standing Committee, Father Moyer's behavior has clearly constituted a breach of the Discipline of the Church, disobedience of his ordination vows, and his abandonment of Communion.

Please know that while prompted by Father Moyer's recent act of becoming a nominee for election as a so-called "bishop" by the FIF/NA organization, the Standing Committee's action came in response to his past and present canonical offenses.

Please also recognize that while in some parts of the Anglican Communion Father Moyer's actions would not have violated the canons, it is quite clear that his actions reflect a repeated failure to abide by the canons of THIS part of the Communion. Bishops in the Episcopal Church are obliged to visit their parishes not less than every three years in order to preach, celebrate the Eucharist, preside at baptism and confirmation, and examine the life of the clergy and congregation. Congregations are required to belong to the Church in the Diocese in which their place of worship is situated. Wardens, Vestries, and other officers of a congregation are required to exhibit to the Bishop the Parish Register and to give information on the state of the Congregation, spiritual and temporal.

Rectors, for their part, hold the authority of and responsibility for the conduct of the worship and the spiritual jurisdiction of their parishes, but are subject to the Rubrics of the *Book of Common Prayer*, the Constitution and Canons of the Church, and the pastoral direction of the Bishop. It is their duty to present confirmands to "the" Bishop of the Diocese in which the Congregation is located, not to just any Bishop. Furthermore, on notice being received of the Bishop's intention to visit their congregation, they are required to announce the fact to the congregation.

This does not mean that "supplemental pastoral care" is impermissible. Indeed, the very concept originated in our diocese, as early as 1994. Consistent with the General Convention Canons, the *Book of Common Prayer*, a resolution adopted by our 1994 Diocesan Convention, and the Covenant of our House of Bishops drafted

last March in Texas, I am temporarily willing to permit visiting bishops to serve certain parishes as long as:

a. The parish recognizes my authority as the Bishop of this Diocese and hospitably welcomes me for full visitations more frequently than they do other bishops.

b. The parish pays its required assessments and the amount asked of it for the financial support of the mission of the diocese.

c. The parish participates in the life of the Diocese through attendance at Convention, sending representatives to deanery meetings, etc.

d. The parish agrees to receive the *Pennsylvania Episcopalian* and *Episcopal Life*, so that its people may learn what is going on not only in this diocese, but also in the wider church.

Even within the terms of "supplemental pastoral care," therefore, clergy must see themselves as being in communion with their diocese and bishop. Although they may see themselves still part of the church, in the Episcopal Church clergy who consider themselves "out of communion" with their diocesan bishop and refuse to permit canonically required Episcopal Visitations have in fact abandoned the Communion of the Church. As reported by the Standing Committee, for at least 10 years Father Moyer has refused efforts by both my predecessor and me, as well as our bishop suffragan and assisting bishop to make a full visitation to his parish and to be held accountable.

Based on the Standing Committee's statement of the acts by Father Moyer on the basis of which it had declared him to have abandoned the Discipline, and therefore the Communion, of the Church, as required by our canons I subsequently affirmed the Committee's determination and inhibited Father Moyer from officiating in the Diocese for six months, beginning March 4. In order that the Inhibition can expire and I can avoid the canonical duty of releasing Father Moyer from his obligations as a priest, I sincerely hope that within the six-month period he will transmit to me a written statement of a good-faith retraction of the acts described in the Report and:

a. Acknowledge that his disagreements with the Bishops of this Diocese do not justify his disobedience of the canons and his refusal to allow my predecessor and me to celebrate, preach and confirm at Good Shepherd for the past decade.

b. Agree that the next time he is notified that the Bishop of this Diocese intends to visit, celebrate, preach and confirm, he will welcome the Diocesan Bishop.

c. Disassociate himself from the efforts of FIF/NA to consecrate a "bishop" in violation of the Canons of the Church.

d. Withdraw his civil law suit against the Bishop and the Diocese – something which itself is a clear violation of Canon IV.14.2, and one further indication that Father Moyer is not abiding by the law of the Church.

I hope fervently that Father Moyer will send me the required statement by September 4 and thereby avoid deposition and be able to be at the table for conversations that I am seeking to initiate between the diocese and the Church of the Good Shepherd on a myriad of issues that are now before us as the Church and which are of concern to the people of his parish and him.

In my judgment, Father Moyer is a conscientious pastor, a man of prayer and a gentleman. I also believe that under his leadership his parish is today alienated from the Diocese of Pennsylvania, the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. I am painfully aware of how deep is the fissure between us and what enormity of grace, forgiveness, and love is now required on all of our parts in order to allow God to heal what has been broken.

In conclusion, I ask for your understanding and your prayers for us all, including the clergy and people of the Church of the Good Shepherd, during this difficult time. Please feel free to contact any member of our Standing Committee, our chancellor or me if you have questions or comments regarding this painful situation in our common life as a diocese. And please know how deeply grateful I am for each of you, for the sacrifices you are making for the sake of Christ's ministry, for the strengthening of our congregations' fellowship and witness, and for the ways in which we as a diocese are struggling to manifest God's grace, forgiveness and love.

Faithfully,

+ Charles

Charles E. Bennison, Jr.